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Region – Province – Municipality. Spatial Planning and Spatial Policy in Italy, 1860–2016

Christian Jansen *

Abstract: »Region – Provinz – Stadt. Raumplanung und Raumpolitik in Italien, 1860–2016«. This article explores the history of regions, centralism and regionalism in Italy – a highly controversial political field of state reorganization over 150 years. Focusing on the status of regions within Italy's political power structure and the development of the multi-level governance system, the article draws a line from the foundation of the Italian national state in 1860/61 to the immediate present. It examines political aspirations for decentralized structures and changing perceptions of how to reorganize the state to create efficient structures in different eras as well as power shifts between the different political levels. The article shows that Italian politics oscillated between centralism and regionalism. Reforms took place against the backdrop of different political systems and public debates in a heterogenous country. Since the mid-nineteenth century, the Italian public discussed a federal structure and decentralization. Altogether, reforms were implemented inconsistently, slowly and gradually: The long-term analysis highlights the complexity of constitutional reforms within the background of a set of actor's including regionalist movements, political parties and traditionalist and regionalist sentiments. What we observe is a highly ideological debate on decentralization followed by reservations and resistances across the state. The article concludes that looking at today's Italian politics, attempts for recentralization are gaining ground again. However, the article identifies several dimensions of state transformation. Notions of efficiency and legitimacy have to be taken in account just as much as regional self-interests, diverse structures inherited from the past and the asymmetry of the Italian federalist system. The author stresses the need for a more holistic approach, for a detailed examination of the relationship between those dimensions together with a shift in global power structures. The contribution thus proceeds to develop a multifaceted framework in order to facilitate further research, to understand more fully the shift of power within the Italian multi-level system.

Keywords: History of regions, regionalism, centralization, Italy, multi-level system, state reorganization, constitutional reforms.

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1. Introduction

Given its meandering historical emergence, the status of the regions within Italy's political power structure is an interesting example for a certain political-territorial form that evolved in an almost 150-year-long (and still ongoing) process and is today an important, in some areas *the* most important level of power. Several different actors with various political and economic interests were involved in this process. Due to the source material available today and the requirements of the current state of research it is often impossible to analyse precisely why and when institutional reconfigurations and power shifts between the different political levels (central state, region, province and municipality) occurred.

In what follows I will draw a line from the foundation of the Italian national state in 1860/61 – and briefly look at its background history and the peculiarities of Italian nationalism as far as they are relevant for the development of the multi-level governance system – to the immediate present.

Since the foundation of the nation state in the 1860s, the Italian multi-level system consisted of three levels (municipality, province and central state). In 1946, regions as a further level were established as consequence of the experiences of the centralist, 'totalitarian' *fascismo*. As a political concept the implementation of this level had been discussed since the foundation of the nation state. Today, Italy comprises 20 regions (including five autonomous regions), 110 provinces and 8,047 municipalities (most of them unchanged since the nineteenth century) at the level below the central state. A territorial reform has never happened in Italy, even though the number of provinces has gradually increased. Fourteen bigger cities, former provincial capitals, were declared *città metropolitane* in 2015. They constituted in these cases the third level of the political system.

2. The Starting Point

With a length from north to south of roughly 1,200 km, Italy is a very heterogeneous country in terms of climate, vegetation and roads and transport infrastructure, reaching from high alpine to arid areas, from a central European to a Mediterranean climate zone. Long distance traffic from north to south has to cross the Apennine Mountains, the alpine backbone of Italy, whose lowest passes are 700m above sea level. There are only a few navigable rivers, and nearly all of them run from west to east. Coastal shipping has always played an important role for the north-south route, not least to connect the two large islands Sicily and Sardinia, accounting for a sixth of the Italian territory, with the mainland.

In addition to this heterogeneous landscape, the country experienced historical processes and developed traditions and cultures that varied from region to region. Three characteristic features can be summarised: *firstly*, from the fall of the Roman Empire in the fifth century until 1871 – that is for more than 1,200 years – the peninsula was not united as a state but had a polycentric structure. *Secondly*, large parts of the country belonged to the Habsburg Monarchy and the Spanish Empire; even France considered some areas their sphere of influence. As a result none of the different Italian dynasties could achieve power over the whole country. Furthermore, Italy is shaped by a very strong republican tradition with its proud city-states such as Florence, Venice, Genoa, Pisa, Milan, Siena, Lucca, etc., and the anti-imperial Lombard League established in 1184, which still lends tradition and its name to North Italian regionalism.

Thirdly, Italy has been culturally and politically divided for centuries. Despite modernisation, these long-lasting historical divergences left their mark until today and are difficult to overcome. From late antiquity, Italy's South has pursued its own political and cultural course. The line between today's regions, Marche, Latium and Umbria on the one hand and Abruzzi, Molise and Campania on the other (see maps), separated the South Italian-Sicilian kingdom from the Papal States. It is one of the longest lasting and most influential dividing lines in Europe. The South was rather homogeneous and geared towards the cultural centres of Naples and Palermo, rich in Arab influences and with closer cultural and dynastic ties to Spain than to the rest of Italy. The North was territorially fragmented and politically and culturally shaped by the republican tradition of the city-states. The Papal States served as an additional barrier between South and North Italy.

Thus, conditions were not favourable for the emergence of a pan-Italian identity and the process of nation-building started later on the Peninsula than in other parts of Europe. It received a significant boost when the Genevese historian Simonde de Sismondi published his *Histoire des Républiques Italiennes du Moyen Âge* (A History of the Italian Republics) in Paris in 1807-1818. He was the first to include the history of the many city-states into a homogeneous narrative of Italian history. He emphasised unity in diversity and defined national identity based on the history of the important city republics, which, according to de Sismondi, had significantly contributed to the Renaissance of European civilisation and brought the first flourishing of political freedom in Europe (Simonde de Sismondi 1836; cf. Lyttleton 2001, 163). Leading politicians of the *risorgimento* movement – the Italian nation-building between 1848 and 1871 – such as Giuseppe Mazzini and Carlo Cattaneo, who coined the famous expression of Italy as the country of the 100 cities (*Italia delle cento città*), were highly influenced by Sismondi's view of history. It is rather telling that the book of a French-Swiss historian published in France had such an impact on the first generation of the intellectuals of the *risorgimento* movement. Unlike former absolutist countries, modern state building was advanced only in

the North of the Apennines peninsula, the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia and the north-eastern territories belonging to the Habsburg Monarchy. In central regions (Papal States) and in the South a feudal system prevailed.

3. Setting the Course towards a Centralist Structure in the *Risorgimento* Movement and the Development until 1945

In order to foster internal nation building processes after the foundation of the Kingdom of Italy in 1861, liberal politicians decided on a centralist structure, modelled on the French example, given the heterogeneity of the country. As educational dictatorship it was supposed to unify living conditions and create national coherence. Just as in Spain at the same time and in Turkey half a century later nationalist elites pinned their hopes on the Jacobinic centralist model that during the French revolution had been supposed to bring “traditionalist” and “reactionary” regions to their knees and to force them towards modernity (see Seitz 1997, 8 et seq.; Keating 1988, 48). Only the political experiences of the twentieth century and the catastrophes caused by centralist dictatorships of Fascism, National Socialism and Bolshevism cast doubt on the equation centralisation = modernisation. After World War II the victorious powers established regions (single states) in the previously fascist countries to counterbalance the central state.

However, already 150 years ago a distinctive faction within the *risorgimento* movement formulated key arguments in favour of federalism and wanted to extend the classical ‘horizontal’ separation of powers as laid down by Montesquieu, by adding a vertical division between different state level. In Italy with its many municipalities rich in tradition there were only few regions with historically evolved statehood at an intermediate level. Unlike the already existing single states in Germany the Italian lands were, however, not suitable as pillars of a federalist system. Only very few of them were characterised by internal state cohesion, and if so then most likely in the North, for instance in Tuscany, which had been reorganised in the eighteenth century by Grand Duke Leopold, the later Austrian emperor. But just like the duchies Parma and Modena,¹ Tuscany was a Habsburg secundogeniture and thus, according to the emerging nationalist view, their dukes were foreign rulers. The situation was even clearer in the Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia, which was a well-structured state but as part of the Habsburg Monarchy geared towards Vienna. During the revolution in 1848 and again during the war of independence in 1859, the rulers and ministers

¹ The Congress of Vienna created a Duchy of Lucca. It was passed to Tuscany, since there was no successor to the throne.

of these regions had fled to Austria. They had no legitimacy of their own and could not hold their ground without being backed up by the Austrian army. Also, it became very clear how seriously the King of Piedmont-Sardinia, the most important Italian state, took the “national” borders of his territory: he and his liberal prime minister Camillo Cavour traded Savoy, the home land of his ruling dynasty, and the area surrounding Nice with France for military support. Consequently the nationalist public condemned him as an absolutist “country haggler.”

Even more difficult and thus less suitable to serve as foundation of a federal state was the situation in Central and South Italy. Central Italy was under absolutist rule of the pope (see map 1). After uprisings in the northern regions the Papal States lost the territories won from the seventh to the fifteenth century north of the Patrimonium Petri. While today’s Latium was part of the Papal States until 1870, the Marche, Umbria and Emilia-Romagna had already joined the Kingdom of Italy in 1860. The Vatican State as well as the entire South – the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies with the capital Naples – had not yet achieved a modern form of statehood or, more specifically, Italian nationalists regarded their existing forms of statehood as outdated and not worth preserving.

Figure 1: Italy before the Foundation of the Nation State



By Gigillo83 - Image:Italy 1494 shepherd.jpg, CC BY-SA 3.0,
<<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=12875784>>

Despite this difficult situation and partly by misjudging the profound arguments against a federal structure,² many Italian nationalists were federalists. The liberal Catholic Vincenzo Gioberti advocated a federation presided by the pope, which was, however, declined by Pius IX in 1848 after initial considerations. The pope's U-turn against the foundation of the Italian nation state gave rise to a constellation that was unique compared to nation building processes in other European countries. Italian nationalism faced not only Catholic Austria but also the Papal States. Thus advocating national unity interfered with the religious conviction of most Italians. Not only was the centre of the world Catholic Church located on Italian territory, it also ruled over a theocratic state in the middle of this territory. This was simply incompatible with the concept of a modern nation state.

Yet there were also federalists in the anti-clerical, democratic-republican camp, the most famous among them were Carlo Cattaneo and Giuseppe Ferrari. Based on Italy's heterogeneity but also influenced by philosophers such as Alexis de Tocqueville, who were critical of the French Revolution, they championed the political system of the USA and merely wanted the state to be a "weak" umbrella structure with general leading tasks and highly autonomous single territories. Instead of centralist reforms "from above," the democratic federalists pinned their hopes on mobilising the society and changes "from below." As a result, the Italian unification proved to be "work in progress" in terms of Italy's federal structure. In summer 1860 – Garibaldi was just about to conquer southern Italy – the Piedmont Minister of the Interior Farini, who also headed a commission that was to draw up suggestions for the future structure of the Italian state, demanded to follow Italy's 'natural structure' (*membrature naturali*) and to create six political regions: Piedmont, Sardinia, Liguria, Lombardy, Emilia and Tuscany. Thus Farini's suggested federal structure was based on regions of similar size, which consisted of several provinces (the equivalent of English districts or German *Kreise*) as second level of the new nation state, instead of historically developed states like in Switzerland and the North German Confederation/Imperial Germany. However, before a corresponding law could be drawn up, political events – the collapse of the Kingdom of Two Sicilies and the foreseeable unification with the new nation state – overtook these plans (Seitz 1997, 40-4).

The majority of the political elite was by no means in favour of the unification with the South. They did not want to create a new state but transfer the existing political structures of the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia to the Kingdom of Italy. This was, in my view, the most important reason why from autumn 1860 different federal models were discussed but had no chance of being

² Most importantly, how was the universalist religious claim of the pope on being the leader of all Catholics worldwide and the territorial sovereign of the Papal States to be integrated into an Italian federal State?

realised when the Italian nation state was founded. Still in 1860, Garibaldi set up a regional council in the conquered South; and even Cavour promised the South autonomy after the collapse of the Bourbon monarchy. But already in November 1860, Farini's successor, the Minister of the Interior Marco Minghetti, presented a revised plan for the new state structure, which was diametrically opposed to Farini's intentions (Seitz 1997, 40).³ Minghetti considered the provinces the pillars of the central state. Although his plan provided for an intermediate level (*consorzi interprovinciali*) responsible for public contracts, higher education, cultivation, hunting and fishing, it should only facilitate the transition to a centralised state (*facilitare il trapasso dallo stato della divisione*). Just as the provinces were governed by a prefect appointed by the central government, governors should be representatives of and answer to the minister of the interior. And yet even this rather centralist model had no chance to pass parliament and was declined in June 1861. Consequently, Prime Minister Ricasoli suspended the existing regional governments in Florence, Naples, and Palermo in early October and rescinded autonomy for Tuscany and the former Kingdom of Two Sicilies.

The leading politician of the *risorgimento* movement, the National Liberal Camillo Cavour, left no doubt about why the concept of regionalisation that had previously been believed sensible was now abandoned: he considered military rule the only possible form of government in the "weakest and most corrupt part of Italy," as he put it – and referred to the South of Italy that had come to the Kingdom of Italy due to Garibaldi's high-handed actions and explicitly against Cavour's plans. Cavour and his liberal progressive fellow campaigners were convinced that a dictatorship over South Italy would in the long term foster an efficient administration and modernise the economy. Napoleonic centralism based on the Jacobinic concept of the unitary state that was characterised by a centre-periphery cleavage served as blue print for the administrative structure, which was supposed to unify different regional traditions and prerequisites. An alternative proposal providing self-governing regional rights was rejected by the parliamentary majority, since it was their objective to modernise the backward areas in the South and on the islands through an educational dictatorship. In 1865, the Kingdom of Italy was subdivided into 69 provinces along the lines of French administrative structures. A prefect served as the extended arm of the central government. Tax law was standardised, which favoured the North. A centralised structure was implemented in Italy although the original concepts of the most important pioneers of the nation state foundation, Cavour and Mazzini, entailed federal elements – whether in regard to a potential merger into the United States of Europe or by emphasising the significance of local self-government (Seitz 1977, 37-39, 45; Ganci 1981).

³ Therefore it makes no sense to subsume both plans as 'regionalisation projects' under a 'Farini-Minghetti-proposal.'

Since the downfall of the Bourbons in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies the governing Liberals gradually radicalised: they always favoured the centralist solution over federalist alternatives that were also discussed in order to consolidate their power and to push through their objective to educate the backward regions of the swiftly established nation state. Their key argument (similar to the French Revolution) was that the provinces, the regions – and particularly the southern parts of the country – were the source of the “reaction,” of clericalism, and “superstition” jeopardising the modernising project of the nation state unification. And indeed, in the 1860s a rebellion started in South Italy against the demands of the new nation state (taxes, conscription, compulsory schooling, etc.). The uprising was quelled by the central state with the utmost effort. This conflict turned into a civil war with more casualties than all unification wars against Austria combined (see Jansen 2012, 179-202). Several uprisings against the central government kept flaring up particularly in Sicily in the course of the nineteenth century. It is impossible to decide whether these riots were exclusively directed against centralism and whether a different political strategy by the central government would have prevented them.

Not only political opposition, but also the obvious economic problems of the South, which were investigated in-depth by parliamentary committees and social scientists (Cassata 2011, 10-21; Frigessi 2003; Gibson 2002),⁴ in the late nineteenth century, resulted from 1895 in an anti-centralist current called meridionalism (*meridione* = South). A number of influential opposition politicians were meridionalists ranging from the Socialist historian Gaetano Salvemini to the leader of the Communist Party Antonio Gramsci to the founder of the Catholic People's Party (forerunner party of the *Democrazia Cristiana*) Luigi Sturzo. Tellingly, they were all from the South. Their initiatives did not have much influence on the decision-making process of the government. However, they raised the awareness of the political elites and introduced the “question of the South” into the public discourse understood as a social issue that had to be resolved by the central government. Martina Seitz rightly stresses that although an autonomous movement emerged in Sicily, the continental South in general lacked political regionalism. She explains this “surprising fact” by pointing at the “radical suppression of separatist tendencies” during the Italian civil war of the 1860s, as well as at “semi-feudalist conditions” and the “impact of the Church.” All this prevented a politicisation of the people in the South (on meridionalist tendencies see Seitz 1997, 49-53; e.g. *Rerum Scriptor* 1900).

As other key aspects we could add clientelism and certain specific characteristics of Italian politics. Members of parliament played a far more important role than organised parties and voters' ideological affiliations to political par-

⁴ One of the most influential was the anthropologist Cesare Lombroso, who interpreted the peculiarities of the South in an anthropological/racist fashion.

ties.⁵ They were supposed to establish a relationship to the centre (*raccordo al centro*) on behalf of their voters (clients) and to see that as many resources as possible were brought into their constituencies. Alexander Grasse and Francesca Gelli have pointed out that this clientelism in the country of 100 cities combined with a distinct localism (*campanilismo*) (Cavazza 2012, 70 et seq.)⁶ was the reason that “in Italy the formation of the modern state was a process that took place mainly at local and regional level, regardless of Italian centralism.” We do not have to clarify here whether the development in Italy differs from France, or whether even French centralism was more assertion and ideology than reality. However, Grasse and Gelli are certainly right when they argue that Rome in Italy “was never able to fulfil the function that Paris had always performed in the French central state.” Stefano Cavazza has coined the expression of “a weak centralism” for liberal Italy (Grasse and Gelli 2012, 187; Cavazza 2012, 72). Yet this was less the result of certain political objectives and (failed) efforts of Italian governments towards centralism (on the federalist tradition see Cavazza 2012, 71-78).⁷ Historical traditions in Italy and France differed considerably: Rome became the capital of Italy only in 1871 and was little respected, whereas Paris had been the centre of the French state since the Middle Ages.

Cavazza convincingly demonstrates that localism and regionalism in Italy before 1945 was never opposed to the nation state and had a rather cultural and folkloristic character. They were politically explosive only in one situation: strikingly, when the Sicilian Francesco Crispi was prime minister, the democratic-republican opposition in the North, drawing on Cattaneo and other federalist theorists, demanded devolution and decentralisation based on allegations of a ‘corrupt’ South in contrast to a ‘moral’ North.⁸

In the South neither regionalism nor separatism ever emerged unlike in the Basque region, Ireland, Scotland, Normandy or Corsica, although the political discourse of meridionalism in Italy also explained regional disadvantages with colonial dependency. The political elites in southern Italy considered it more promising and beneficial to receive sinecures and resources from the centre and to distribute them locally than to solve problems autonomously. On these grounds the only serious separatist movement in the South, which emerged in Sicily, soon played itself out after 1945. Also, criminal secret organisations such as the Mafia opted for centralism (see Jansen 2012, 2007, 95-99), after they had initially supported the autonomist movement in the immediate post-war period

⁵ In this context the most complex phenomenon of *trasformismo* could be mentioned, but to go into this in detail would take us too far afield.

⁶ In this important article on the topic Cavazza translates *campanilismo* as *municipalism*.

⁷ Cavazza points at the paradox that “it was actually Piemonte’s weakness that led to a centralist solution as it could not ensure unity against opposition from the other states,” p. 74.

⁸ Ibid., p. 78 et seq.: “The incontestable fact is that two moralities prevail in Italy [...]. In moral terms Rome and Naples are another world from Milan and Turin” (*Morale nord e morale Sud*, in: *L’Italia del Popolo*, January 8/9, 1895, quoted from *ibid.*, p. 79).

but soon realised that the centralist system was more profitable for them. From then on the autonomist movement was condemned to a shadowy existence.

4. The Constitution of 1947: Regionalisation – in Name Only

After the war experience of 1915-1918 had significantly fostered the nation building process, the twenty years of Fascist rule (1922-1943) marked the heyday of centralisation efforts in Italy. Notably, the Fascist regime abandoned municipal self-government. Local mayors (*podestà*) were now appointed in Rome just as province governors before. At the same time, Fascism encouraged local cultural traditions, especially the so-called people's culture (*cultura popolare*) (see Cavazza 2003).

After the authoritarian and centralist modernisation projects of Fascism, the strategies of the 1860s were perceived as misguided for a heterogeneous country. Moreover, separatist movements – apart from Sicily also in the Aosta Valley, South Tyrol and Friuli-Venezia Giulia, which were directed against neighbour nation states – put considerable pressure on reorganisation efforts at the end of World War II. An all-party government, established by the Allies, decreed autonomy statutes for Sardinia (January 27, 1944), Sicily (March 18, 1944) and the Aosta Valley, where the anti-Fascist resistance movement was very strong (August 7, 1945), even before the war was over and in anticipation of the debates on a new constitution. With Mussolini's fall in 1943 the nation state had collapsed and the country was effectively divided (1943-1945). South of the front advancing north the Anglo-American occupiers dominated; in the North the Germans and the puppet republic of Salò were in charge. The *resistenza*, the foundation myth of Italian post-war politics, was active only in a few regions of the North. Thus, after governments from 1915 to 1943 had made efforts to unify the country, federalist tendencies in 1945 were stronger than ever since the *risorgimento*.

The Italian constitution, enacted in 1947, coming into effect on January 1, 1948, was a compromise between the Catholic camp and the laicist Left. Both political camps were heterogeneous. They not only mirrored the North-South divide. The Catholic bloc, which consisted of the largest party *Democrazia Cristiana* and some smaller parties and was supported by the clergy, was split in an authoritarian and a Christian-democratic faction. The political Left, a democratic-republican group, comprised Socialists (PSI) and Communists (PCI). Regarding the question of regionalisation Jacobinic centralism opposed the principle of subsidiarity of Catholic social teaching, as provided in the encyclicals *Rerum Novarum* (1891) and – forty years later based on this – *Quadragesimo anno*. This principle advocated a weak state and gave priority and autonomy to the lower level of the multi-level governance system, whereas

the higher level was supposed to support the lower levels financially. Both large political camps had experienced Fascism and anti-Fascist resistance, thus the constituent assembly was overall sceptical towards a strong state. Also, the ideological pioneers of both camps – Luigi Sturzo for the DC and Antonio Gramsci for the PCI – were meridionalists.

Consequently, the constitution provided for decentralism and regionalism. However, various provisions were contradictory (as many other important compromises). The first part of the constitution stipulated basic principles (*principi fondamentali*) and article 5 stated that the Republic of Italy was *una e indivisibile*, a Jacobinic slogan from the French Revolution. Yet the following sentence recognised *le autonomie locali* (local or municipal autonomy) and declared *più ampio decentramento amministrativo* (greatest possible administrative decentralisation). Moreover, the fifth part of the constitution regulated “the regions, the provinces, the municipalities” (art. 114-133). It was the first time that an Italian constitution even mentioned regions, their rights and (predominantly) their obligations in no less than eleven articles (117-127) in detail. These regulations remained by and large in effect until a substantial reform in 1997, which strengthened the position of the regions.

Article 116 of the constitution stipulates in particular two new autonomous regions apart from those established already in 1944/45: “Trentino-Alto Adige/South Tyrol” and “Friuli-Venezia Giulia.” Yet the special rights of the five autonomous regions were not further defined; the following ten articles of the constitution only mention *regioni* in general. Article 117 stipulated the legislative powers of the regions. At the same time, it gave priority to the legislation of the central state and declared that regional laws should not be contrary to the “national interest” nor to the interest of other regions (*non siano in contrasto con l'interesse nazionale e con quello di altre Regioni*). The regions’ competences entailed local and regional administration, economy (including tourism), infrastructure and transportation, each of them limited by national legislation. Accordingly, article 119 granted the regions “financial autonomy” – but only limited by the central state’s legislative. The South question is first mentioned here: the ‘state’ could support the South and the islands by granting them special subsidies (*contributi speciali*). Article 118 of the constitution laid down the competences of the regions, which were sandwiched between local and central state responsibilities and thus rather limited, particularly since the regions were supposed to exercise their administrative function by delegating it to municipalities, provinces and other local bodies. A regional administrative apparatus was not intended. Article 120 explicitly limited the power of the regions and thus their leverage to put pressure on the central state. They were neither allowed to collect duties nor to impede free movement and goods traffic within Italy.

Article 121 to 127 determined the political bodies of the regions (art. 121 defines the regional council as legislative, government as executive and the president as representative of the region and head of administration), the elec-

toral procedure (determined by the central state) and the framework of the regional parliaments' tasks (art. 122), the constitutions of the regions (art. 123) and their jurisdiction (art. 125). The whole tenor of these regulations was restrictive. They repeatedly stressed the priority of the central state: art. 124 provided for a government commissioner based in the regional capital, who was supposed to coordinate state/federal and regional administration as administrative head. Art. 126 exclusively addressed the dissolution of the regional parliaments, which was possible on the grounds of "national security"; art. 127 provided that every bill voted by a regional parliament could only come into effect after the government commissioner had released it for publication. Accordingly, the central government could reject laws of the regional parliament, when they were contrary to "national interests" and to the interests of other regions. The regions were granted legal supervision of their provinces and municipalities by art. 130, art. 131 provided a list of nineteen regions (see Figure 2). Art. 132 described how regions could merge or be newly established and how provinces and municipalities could switch from one region to another – a referendum was required to do so. There was only one case since 1948: the decision in 1963 to split Abruzzi from Molise realised in 1970.

Figure 2: Italy and Its Regions



Source: <www.vidiani.com/maps/maps_of_europe/maps_of_italy/detailed_wine_map_of_italy.jpg> (Accessed May 7, 2017).

Apart from the islands Sardinia and Sicily, independent kingdoms during early modern times, with their natural borders, no other region that was established

in 1947 had the same borders as their predecessor states (unlike Bavaria, Hamburg and Bremen in the Federal Republic of Germany), even though most regions could be traced back to historical territories and states and invented traditions accordingly, such as Tuscany to the former Grand Duchy (1569-1861), Lombardy to various, very different territories of the same name, Liguria and Venetia to the glorious maritime republics of Genoa and Venice, Piedmont to the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia and Latium, Basilicata (Lucania), Campania, Apulia in some cases to ancient tribes and territories. Whereas the twenty regions are relatively homogeneous in size (Sicily, the largest, is roughly eight times the size of the Aosta Valley; in contrast, Bavaria is two hundred times the size of Bremen), they differ significantly in population: Lombardy has 10 million, the Aosta Valley only 120,000 inhabitants (a ratio of 100:1, the ratio between the population figure of North Rhine-Westphalia and Bremen, the two extremes, is only 27:1).

Despite the experiences during centralist Fascism and notwithstanding contradictory statements the majority of Italian politicians (although women were allowed to vote since 1946, nearly all politicians were male) acted in continuity with the constitutional and administrative tradition of Liberal Italy since the 1860s. Administrative decentralisation and regionalisation on the entire peninsula are stipulated by the constitution. But apart from the five autonomous regions, these innovations remained irrelevant until the 1970s. Whereas non-autonomous regions existed in name only until 1970, the five autonomous regions were given a special constitution (*statuto speciale*) by granting them *leggi costituzionali* (constitutional laws)⁹ in February 1948, that is shortly after adopting the constitution (Friuli-Venezia Giulia in January 1963, after the Cold War had calmed down),¹⁰ which allowed them financial autonomy in particular, but also extensive legislative and administrative powers.

The important disparity in Italy's constitutional and legal history between *paese legale* – legal regulations – and *paese reale* – the reality of life became, once again, obvious in the persistent deficiencies of the regionalisation process. Another reason was that the political front lines changed to the opposite under the first and very influential prime minister Alcide De Gasperi and his successors, who all came from the state party of the First Republic, *Democrazia Cristiana*. The DC, which traditionally advocated federalism, gradually turned into a centralist party when it was in government and tried to prevent a restriction of its power almost at all costs. It rhetorically employed the principle of subsidiarity but increasingly ignored it in reality.

⁹ Type of legislation with higher requirements, for instance a vote in both chambers of parliament.

¹⁰ Due to the controversial border between Italy and Yugoslavia and the status of Trieste ("free territory" until 1954, then part of Italy) the constitution of Friuli-Venezia Giulia was not adopted before 1963 since the government required the votes of the opposition.

Table 1: Socio-Economic Indicators for the Twenty Italian Regions from 1951 to 2012

	Population (millions) 2013	Incid. of Poverty 2006	Index of per Capita Income (Italy = 100)					Saldo per Capita 2005
			1951	1970	1980	1997	2012	
Piedmont	4.4	7.1%	153	124	118	116	108 (9)	469 (5)
Lombardy	10.1	3.7%	159	135	131	129	128 (3)	3,3653 (1)
Liguria	1.6	5.2%	154	119	112	118	106 (10)	1,368 (11)
Trentino/ South Tyrol	1.1	5.1%	113	106	119	128	132 (1)	388 (6)
Aosta Valley	0.1	6.8%	n/s	n/s	n/s	n/s	134 (1)	809 (10)
Venezia	4.9	4.5%	88	107	110	123	115 (5)	1,836 (2)
Friuli-Venezia Giulia	1.2	7.2%	117	103	114	125	113 (6)	212 (7)
Emilia-Rom.	4.5	2.5%	105	115	131	130	122 (4)	1,751 (3)
Tuscany	3.8	4.6%	99	110	110	109	109 (8)	160 (8)
Umbria	0.9	7.3%	80	90	101	96	90 (12)	-1.785 (13)
Marche	1.5	5.4%	75	92	108	108	99 (11)	-146 (9)
Latium	5.9	6.8%	104	108	102	112	113 (6)	737 (4)
Abruzzo	1.3	11.8%	62	73	84	89	87 (13)	-1.394 (12)
Molise	0.3	21.5%	62	73	80	82	78 (14)	-2.510 (18)
Camparia	5.9	27.0%	71	70	66	62	63 (20)	-2.311 (15)
Apulia	4.1	19.4%	64	74	71	67	67 (16)	-2.056 (14)
Basilicata	0.6	24.5%	53	63	68	65	70 (14)	-2.313 (16)
Calabria	2.0	23.3%	53	58	57	57	64 (19)	-2.817 (20)
Sicily	5.1	30.8%	62	66	66	63	65 (18)	-2.661 (19)
Sardinia	1.7	15.9%	80	79	72	75	76 (15)	-2.361 (17)

The columns show from left to right: Population (2013), proportion of poor people among the population (2006), index of per capita income in five year steps between 1950 and 2012; balance of government revenue and expenditures per capita (2005). Rank in parenthesis in both columns (1-20).

Sources: col. 1 and 7: <[https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Regione_\(Italia\)>](https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Regione_(Italia)>); col. 2: Incidence of poverty, cf. Ambrosania, Bordignon and Cerniglia 2008, col. 3-5: SVIMEZ 1961 und 1998, in: McCarthy, 61; col. 8: CENSIS, 27^o rapporto sulla situazione del paese, Milano 1993, 666.

Table 1 illustrates the still significant North-South divide regarding income and living standard despite impressive economic successes. Overall, differences levelled down over the years, but still remained higher than the European average: in the industrial North with its steel and car industry and roughly a third of the Italian population, the per capita gross domestic product in the late 1960s was between 30 and 50 percent above national average. In the South, on the other hand, with almost 40 per cent of the population, it was 30 to 50 percent below average. In no other European country was the economic gradient as steep as in Italy. In France, the area surrounding Paris accounted for a gross domestic product above the national average, whereas all other regions were inferior to the average gross domestic product with 85 to 95 percent. In Germany, the GDP of all administrative districts (*Regierungsbezirk*) apart from Hamburg ranged between 80 and 120 percent of the average. By supporting economically

weak regions and taking compensatory measures (such as the inter-state fiscal adjustment in Germany) regional differences were levelled in other European countries to a much higher extent than in Italy – despite enormous modernisation programmes.¹¹

Few regions in Italy show a continuous development: only the two autonomous regions Trentino/South Tyrol and the Aosta Valley (albeit figures about these areas are incomplete) and the capital area Latium were able to improve during the industrial (1945-1980) and the post-industrial phase (since 1980) of Italy's economic development, compared to national average. Trentino/South Tyrol and the Aosta Valley used their autonomous status to benefit economically, the other three autonomous regions failed to do so. The continuously improving economic performance of the capital area was grist to the mill of those who considered Rome mushrooming at the expense of the whole country. *Roma – ladrona*, was one of the most effective propaganda slogans of the *Lega Nord*, the party that represented the interests of the North and at times even strove for secession. These slogans fell on fertile ground, not least because the triangle Piedmont-Lombardy-Liguria that had been a thriving industrial area from the late nineteenth century continuously lost its profound lead in wealth. This was particularly true for Liguria, which fell back from second to tenth place in the ranking of the regions. Lombardy, on the other hand, the most populous region with roughly a sixth of the national population, also lost its previous rank compared to national average, but still has the highest income per capita of all non-autonomous regions. The development in most of the other regions in the 'North East and the centre' is overall positive (see key of Figure 2), namely Emilia-Romagna, Venetia, Tuscany and Marche. The economic performance of Umbria and Friuli-Venezia Giulia is markedly different from the successful NEC-regions (Jansen 2007, 81-5).¹²

Despite its overall rising prosperity, the South failed to reduce the gap between its own economic output and national average, both during the economic miracle and the post-industrial phase. The indices show considerable differences between the Southern regions. Whereas Campania (surrounding Naples) and Sardinia continuously fell back and Sicily stagnated, the other regions caught up, above all Abruzzo, the most Northern region of the South, which benefited from the vicinity of successful Central Italy (+ 25 points). The economic performance of the small Basilicata is also impressive (+ 17 points). After a long period of stagnation Calabria has improved significantly since the turn of the millennium and has no longer the lowest income per capita – at present Campania comes in last. Despite some achievements due to land re-

¹¹ On the little impact of the modernisation programmes for the Southern regions see Jansen 2007, 99 et seq.

¹² The NEC regions (Italian abbreviation for North Eastern and Central Italy) are seen as success stories of the diffuse industrialisation (*modello NEC industrializzazione diffusa*).

form, infrastructure measures and tourism, the South clearly lags behind North and Central Italy up to the present regarding other economic and social indicators such as GDP, income per capita, unemployment rate, educational attainments and cultural and social opportunities. Unemployment and particularly youth unemployment is three times higher in the South than in the North. Further indicators (unemployment rate, female employment, employment structure, educational attainments, family size, etc.) confirm that Italy is still deeply divided along the centuries old border between the former Kingdom of Naples and the Papal States. Despite multibillion investments from Rome and later from Brussels, unemployment remained higher, female employment lower. Whereas in 1950 three quarters of the work force in the Southern regions worked in agriculture, about the same number of people are employed in the service sector today. Industrialising the South by spending a lot of money proved to be a flash in the pan: after the percentage of industrial workers had doubled between 1950 and 1970, it has fallen back to the same level as 1950 today.

The North-South gap of the income per capita causes different consumer patterns: the consumption of meat and tobacco is statistically higher in the North than in *mezzogiorno*. However, these figures based on incomes from the state tobacco monopoly also indicate a problem, which has to take into consideration in regard to the social and economic situation of South Italy: the pivotal role of the shadow economy that is not reflected by statistics. This entails smuggling (untaxed cigarettes), undeclared labour (ranging from neighbourhood assistance to the service sector to uninsured and untaxed work of family members in agriculture) and finally the underground economy controlled by criminal organisations with its most important sectors drug and arms dealing as well as human trafficking (refugees, prostitutes, and work slaves). Some of those deemed officially unemployed work in these areas. The South benefits highly from the shadow economy and is by no means as poor as official statistics reflect. According to estimates, roughly 90 percent of shop owners in Catania (Sicily) pay protection money and 25 to 40 percent of the GDP in South Italy comes from criminal activities. In the late 1980s the per capita income in Palermo ranked 70th among the provinces, but per capita consumption 7th!

The different regions in Italy can also be categorised according to their political structure. The Left (PCI and PSI in the First Republic until 1991, various centre-left alliances during the Second Republic and since 2007 *Partito Democratico*) dominated almost all bigger industrial cities and the “red belt” in Central Italy from Liguria in the North West to the Emilia-Romagna, Tuscany and Umbria to the Marches. Here, the Communists, second largest party in the First Republic but never part of the government, gained several power bastions by democratic means such as many municipalities and regions as well as the third channel of the public broadcaster RAI. The DC strongholds in the North were in the “white rectangle” of the Veneto region (Verona-Vicenza-Treviso-Padua), where the DC – its party colour is white – and its affiliated organisations show

an above average concentration. DC strongholds in South Italy were in the regions Marches, Abruzzo, Basilicata and Apulia. In Piedmont, Lombardy and in the Basilicata *Democrazia Cristiana* and the Left were about equal. This political situation in the regions remained the same throughout the entire First Republic.

The right-wing Christian Democratic governments of the first fifteen republican years did not pursue a regionalisation policy as required by the constitution due to power-political reasons. Even the constitutional court made some decisions fostering centralism. A change of course didn't happen until 1960 and therefore sparked many hopes. The new slogan was *centro-sinistra* – the DC tried to involve the PSI into the governing coalition. The left-wing Catholic and social reformer Amintore Fanfani was the driving force of this new strategy towards the Left in the DC. Apart from many other reforms he promised to implement regionalisation. Initially, resistance in the DC was insurmountable, since the establishment of regional governments and the extension of regional rights would have favoured the PCI in its strongholds of the 'red belt.' After all, parliament passed the statute of the last autonomous region Friuli-Venezia Giulia. When the regionalisation process was again postponed due to power-political reasons, next to other unredeemed reform promises (sweeping reform of the school system, land reform, measures to reduce the North-South divide, reform of social insurances, tax reform, democratic urban development and anti-monopoly laws), frustration increased and finally turned into sharp political confrontation during the years between 1968 and 1976.

From 1946 considerable financial subsidies flowed into the South – the centralist equivalent of the German inter-state fiscal adjustment. These measures affected the economic North-South divide only marginally (see Jansen 2007, 99-103), which contributed to the rise of regionalism in the North during the economic crisis of the 1980s – we will look at this in detail later. At the same time – and initially more importantly – the continuous cash flow from 'Rome,' that is to say funded by the prosperous¹³ North, and from Brussels, funded by the European partners, prevented separatism and political regionalism in *mezzogiorno*.

It was not until 1968 in the context of a general wave of democratisation and pressured by social mass movements and massive protests that the Centre-Left governments implemented regional institutions as required by the constitution along with, for instance, the introduction of work councils. After a bill regarding funding the regions (Leonardi, Nanetti and Putnam 1993; for a list with the most important laws see Seitz 1997, 61) and against fierce opposition of the political Right, parliament passed an electoral law for the regional parliaments, which were elected in June 1970 for the first time. In 1970/71 the regional parliaments enacted constitutions influenced by the movement of 1968 that

¹³ I will not go into the question of whether a (post) colonial constellation or the North is responsible for the underdevelopment of the South.

entailed many plebiscitary aspects. The regionalisation process finally started in 1975. Faced with political violence first from the Right, then from the Left, the DC drew on the all-party coalition of the foundation years of the republic. At the same time and due to failing left-wing governments in the Western world (Cuba, Indonesia, Greece, Chile were the most frequently mentioned examples) the PCI was ready for a ‘historical compromise’ with the DC. Regionalisation policy was the first practical realisation of this ‘historical compromise,’ the first successful cooperation of the two major political parties to overcome the political stalemate of the system of the First Republic. Two non-autonomous regions drove the regionalisation process forward; Lombardy, where the left wing of the DC was strong, and Emilia-Romagna, a stronghold of the PCI, where the Communists pursued a pragmatic course, because its grassroots members had more to lose than their chains. The advocates of Italy’s regionalisation programme during the 1970s – apart from the left wing of the DC and PCI leaders, public opinion has to be considered as well in this context – wanted to widen the margins for political manoeuvre given the political stalemate at national level. There was even a majority to abolish the provinces, considered the extended arm of the central government, but too many people would have lost their profitable posts making this reform unenforceable.

However, regionalisation made progress. Art. 117 of the constitution was finally realised in 1975 through the law No. 382 by determining norms for the cooperation between central and regional governments resulting in the inter-leaving of powers, and partly in a competing legislation (contrary to the intention of the constitution). The decree-law¹⁴ No. 616 from 1977 shifted more political-administrative competences to the regions. They got financial autonomy and control of social and health services, public construction project, economic, urban, and regional development. Only through these regulations, did the regions which were governed by left leaning majorities after regional elections in 1974 (autonomous regions) and 1975 (non-autonomous regions), gain political competences. From now on, the regions controlled roughly a fourth of public spending. However, the level of autonomy differed a lot: whereas the autonomous regions received 50 percent of their income from the central state, it was roughly 90 percent for the non-autonomous regions, which were therefore still highly dependent from Rome (Seitz 1997, 62 et seq.; Grasse 2005, 86-8; Gelli and Grasse, 190-3; Leonardi et al. 2003).

Until the end of the First Republic (early 1990s) the regions used the emerging opportunities in different ways, depending on the political culture. In some cases parties acted in a clientelistic fashion and took advantage of the new institutions to put their own people on profitable administrative posts and secure their political influence. According to a report of the newspaper *Repubbli-*

¹⁴ *Decreto legge* – a type of legislation discussed and passed in parliamentary committees if a compromise can be reached that is agreed on by the opposition.

ca there were 427,889 professional politicians and political advisors in 2007. The roughly 1,000 members of the national and regional parliaments in Italy received a net salary of 14,000 €, twice as much as parliamentary allowances in Germany and France. Salaries were particularly high in the regional administration of Sicily, one of the poorest regions (Palermo and Woelk 2007, 328). Some regions developed into interesting laboratories, where citizen-oriented policy was tested and implemented, which will not be gone into here.¹⁵

Two general developments during the 1980s and 1990s were the reason why regionalisation, even Italy's transformation into a federal state, remained on the agenda and political conditions for decentralisation improved; progress on European integration and the emergence of new regionalist parties and separatist tendencies. Having said this we still have to bear in mind that discussions on political reform in Italy during the last 50 years have been short-winded in general. Public opinion is highly volatile and implemented reforms are often not given enough time to settle.

5. Constitutional Reform since 1997 and Italy's Transformation into a Federal State

Given the obvious problems, a substantial constitutional reform was repeatedly discussed from the 1970s. In this context the Federal Republic of Germany with its similar Fascist history served as a model: the German constitution, adopted at the same time as the one in Italy, seemed to work more efficient. In a political climate favouring decentralisation not only Germany's electoral franchise and chancellor democracy but also its federal structure with the two chambers *Bundestag* and *Bundesrat* was seen as exemplary (instead of the Italian *bicameralismo perfetto* with its House of Representatives and Senate). Apart from many other reasons and general disenchantment with the political system resulting in a tendency for experimentation, there are, in my view, two key reasons for this political mood.

Firstly, in the 1980s and even more so during the euphoria of the years 1989-1991 the nation state seemed to be obsolete. This is why both the supra-national level of the European Union and the regional level gained importance. *Secondly*, new regionalist parties emerged: the *Lega Nord* in North Italy benefited in particular from the traditional parties losing their legitimacy. It was formed as a merger of different parties influenced by a Europe-wide regionalist

¹⁵ To mention some examples of political scientific studies: Grasse 2005, 141-320, analyses the region Emilia-Romagna in great detail, less detailed Seitz, 109-68, "Autonomie und Funktionsfähigkeit der italienischen Regionen am Beispiel Lombardei und Kampanien", that is to say based on the poorest and the richest non-autonomous regions; Gelli and Grasse 2012, 41-50 compare the political class in Apulia and Venezia.

wave and opposed to centralism and financial support for the South. By referring to nineteenth century federalists such as Carlo Cattaneo and Vincenzo Gioberti, the *Lega* championed the partition of Italy into three republics: the North called *padania*, Central Italy around Rome and the South. Using a mixture of regionalism and populism, drastic and obscene slogans as well as folkloristic events, the *Lega* was highly successful at regional and municipal elections. Its political counterpart in the South was *La Rete* (the net). It had, at first sight, some similarities to the *Lega*: both movements were headed by a charismatic individual – Leoluca Orlando at *La Rete* and Umberto Bossi at the *Lega Nord* – and both profoundly benefited from a general weariness towards the political parties of the First Republic, since both movements saw themselves in opposition to the *partitocrazia*. But unlike the *Lega Nord*, *La Rete* wanted to achieve this objective by mobilising the Sicilians' moral sense, by strengthening democratic and civil society structures and, in doing so, facing corruption and influence of the Mafia. *La Rete* was less successful than its northern counterpart not only due to its lower population figures compared with the densely populated North and the *Lega's* strongholds in Lombardy, Venezia and Piedmont, but also because Orlando did not use populism but laborious grassroots policy. Whereas the *Lega Nord* continued clientelistic policy supplemented by a new anti-centralist rhetoric, *La Rete* tried to combine activists of the civil society movement against the Mafia.

The success of the new regionalist parties, and even more so the meteoric rise of Silvio Berlusconi and his anti-party *Forza Italia* (FI) (Jansen 2007, 210-20) signified the loss of legitimacy of the parties that had shaped the First Republic, in particular the government parties *Democrazia Cristiana*, PSI, etc., which disbanded in the early 1990s. Although PCI (Communists) and MSI (neo-Fascists) – which had not been part of the government coalition – were less affected by this loss of legitimacy, they also rebranded as *Partito Democratico della Sinistra* (PDS/Democratic Party of the Left) and *Alleanza Nazionale* (AN/National Alliance).

Whereas the constitution of 1947 largely remained unchanged until today, a new electoral law for both chambers of the Italian parliament was applied by national referendum, as the founding act of the Second Republic. Based on this law, four new electoral systems came into effect, at local level for municipalities with less and more than 15,000 inhabitants and at provincial and regional level. Unlike at national level the electoral system at the lower levels were mostly two-tier majority voting systems with two victors of the first ballot facing each other in the second. Already in early 1993 parliament had decided on direct ballot for mayors. These innovations resulted in a more profound restructuring of municipal, provincial and regional politics than at national level with stable party coalitions and a strong personalisation of politics. The first direct ballots of mayors and municipal elections in autumn 1993 confirmed the dramatic loss of legitimacy of the political class. The populist slo-

gans of *Alleanza Nazionale* and its right-wing partner parties gained massive results. However, the Left was victorious overall and expected great chances at the next national elections. The mayor elections were a disaster for the DC; they could only win in two out of 100 cities and remained below 15 percent in most of them.

In the transition period from the First to the Second Republic, different political campaigns between June 1991 and April 1993 led to a broad Centre-Left alliance from the left wing of the DC to the Greens and *La Rete* to the succession parties of the PCI. Between 1994 and 2006 it stood for election at all levels under varying names and constellations until it finally merged into *Partito democratico*. After the surprising election victory of the political right in March 1994 and the first government under Berlusconi that soon failed, a cross-party government of experts gained power and called new elections. In 1994 the left-wing parties had underestimated Berlusconi and due to their fragmentation had not taken advantage of the opportunities offered by the new electoral law that benefited party alliances. In 1996, they got it all right. In February the left-wing Catholic ‘People’s Party’ and the PCI successor PDS forged an alliance named *Ulivo* (olive tree), which was joined by most of the smaller parties of the political centre. The Centre-Left coalition was able to effectively turn their votes into mandates in 1996. Although all right-wing parties apart from *Forza Italia* gained votes and got a majority of 52 percent, the *Ulivo* coalition under the ex-Christian Democrat Romano Prodi could gain the majority of parliamentary seats. However, it depended on the support of a smaller left-wing party (*Rifondazione Comunista*).

The most ambitious plan of the first Prodi government was a federalist constitutional reform. Immediately at the start of the legislative period the majority parties decided on establishing a *Commissione bicamerale* (committee of both chambers) that had already been implemented several times for the constitutional reform. Whereas the government parties wanted to considerably reform the constitution, the opposition demanded to convene a constituent assembly to draft an entirely new constitution. However, the right-wing parties could not agree on what this new constitution would look like: AN and FI preferred a semi-presidential, centralist system along the lines of the French example, the *Lega Nord* championed an Italian confederation of states, at most a loose federal state. Initially the opposition pursued a merely destructive strategy: the *bicamerale* and the left-wing government were to fail in order to enforce elections for the constituent assembly. But since Berlusconi relied on the goodwill of the government parties due to the financial problems of his media empire, the oppositional boycott front soon dissolved. In late 1996 the opposition joined the constitutional reform committee that elected Massimo D’Alema (PDS) as chairman. In early 1997 even the members of the FI agreed to its task to revise the second part of the constitution until June 30, regarding the form of government, electoral law, and the relationship between the two chambers. In 185 sessions the

reform committee drafted considerable amendments: direct election of the state president; dissolution of the *bicameralismo perfetto*: the house of representatives should be the only body responsible for legislation and control of the government. The senate, on the other hand, was only to appoint the highest judges and administrative civil servants and had to solve disagreements between regional and local bodies; strengthening of the government towards parliament; higher quotas for referenda; attributing a greater role to the regions and the principle of subsidiarity between the different administrative levels.

However, this ambitious project failed, because Berlusconi refused to pass these reforms, which had been mutually agreed on by the committee. The chairman of the committee D'Alema and his party in particular made any effort to reach a compromise with Berlusconi, which almost went above and beyond of what grassroots members could be asked to agree on. Berlusconi's main concern, on the other hand, was not institutional reform but curbing the independence of the judiciary. For obvious reasons he primarily advocated the abolishment of charges such as "illegal funding of political parties" and "accounting fraud" as well as amnesty of people accused of corruption. The official version of why the FI rejected the constitutional reform was that the future president, who was to be elected directly, was granted too few rights. And yet, parliament and *Forza Italia* are not the only ones to blame for the failure of the Great Reform that had been discussed for decades. At least equally important was the lack of public pressure. The atmosphere of crisis from the 1990s had again given way to the willingness to adapt and accommodate in 1996. The collapse of the party system had caused no political and cultural revival. According to the public it was a crisis of the institutions rather than the society. Italians were neither prepared to change their own attitudes nor to actively work towards a reform of the institutions.

Simultaneously and partly in the shadow of the public debates on these issues, the left-wing parties carried out an extensive administrative reform, for which Franco Bassanini (PDS) was responsible. As far as it was feasible without constitutional changes, the 'Bassanini Laws' decentralised the political system and gave the regions a greater role. At the same time, the previously omnipotent central government ceded competences to European institutions. The administration was reorganised, streamlined and made more efficient. Within government the prime minister was assigned more rights, the directly elected presidents of the regional governments accordingly. By the back door, the heads of governments were even granted the authority to lay down guidelines along the lines of the German *Richtlinienkompetenz*. Tellingly, the Bassanini reform was implemented by two decrees, that is to say without parliamentary approval (which seemed unlikely) and hence unconstitutionally.

Prodi's successor, the social democrat Giuliano Amato was able to carry out another constitutional reform in 2000/2001 by focusing on only a few aspects: regionalisation and subsidiary distribution of power between the four levels of

the political system (central government, regions, provinces and municipalities). Against the strong opposition of Berlusconi's camp the constitutional reform was finally approved by a referendum on October 7, 2001. According to art. 138 of the constitution the plebiscite had been necessary, because the left-wing government did not have the majority for a constitutional amendment without the votes of the opposition. Although the Second Republic did not get a new constitution, the small constitutional reform in 2001 did set a new course. Most importantly it drove forward decentralisation and reversed the balance of power between central state and regions.

Art. 114 of the Italian constitution provided equality of the four political levels municipalities, provinces or *città metropolitane*, regions and 'state' and thus replaced centralism that had been the political system in Italy from the 1860s. Art. 116 levels the differences between autonomous and non-autonomous regions – yet there has been precious little sign of this so far because the latter adamantly insist on their privileges. The new art. 117 lists the competences of the central government: foreign policy, defence, protection of the environment, legal norms, social welfare, electoral rights, currency and duty policy, financial policy, citizenship and immigration. State and region have shared responsibility for about 20 areas. *All other political and administrative responsibilities lie with the regions.* Whereas previously the central state was in charge generally, today it is the regions that play a more important role in the multi-level governance system. In this context art. 119, which regulates the financial relationship between regions and central state, was revised. The central state's financial priority over the lower levels was suspended; they were granted full control (*autonomia finanziaria*) of their incomes and expenditures and could levy taxes by themselves. Also, a compensation fund (*fondo perequativo*) is planned to support regions with less tax incomes.¹⁶

As mentioned above, Italy has always been characterised by a discrepancy between constitutional law and reality (*paese legale/paese reale*). In this sense the constitutional reform from 1997/2001 was only another important step towards Italy's regionalisation. Initially this process was partly sabotaged by the following Berlusconi governments (2001-2006 and 2008-2011), because they had been implemented simultaneously to the fall of the centre-left governments and against the new strong man Berlusconi. Since this course of action met considerable opposition and decentralisation was received favourably by the society, the attempts to reverse the constitutional reform failed. This was due partly to the opposition of experts, particularly constitutional experts, partly to disagreements within the right-wing coalition. The *Lega Nord* and FI advocated a federalist system, the two other parties (AN and UDC, that is the rest of the DC's right wing) were centralist. When in 2006 the government tried

¹⁶ See Grasse 2005, p. 457-66, for all constitutional articles on the regions since October 18, 2001 in the original and in German.

to implement a centralist constitutional reform against the opposition of employers, trade unions, oppositional parties and State President Ciampi, a referendum was held. Berlusconi suffered a profound defeat with 61 percent of votes against his policy with a high turnout of 54 percent. The regions responded differently to the new opportunities – in 2007 only 12 regions had adapted their constitutions to the new balance of power, the last was Basilicata in early 2016 (Palermo and Woelk, 330-34; Gelli and Grasse, 200 et seq.).

Despite these delays, key areas of political decision-making are passed on to the lower levels. Italy is no longer a centralist state. This is shown, for instance, by comparing public expenditures at the end of the First Republic (1990) and in 2006 (in percent):

Table 2: Public Expenditures, 1990 and 2006 (in percent)

Expenditures for	Central Government		Lower Levels (Region, Province, Municipality)		Social Insurance	
	1990	2006	1990	2006	1990	2006
General Public Services	87	74	13	26	0	0
Defense	100	100	0	0	0	0
Public Safety	88	87	12	13	0	0
Economic Policy	61	62	39	38	0	0
Protection of Environment	13	15	87	85	0	0
Housing / Public Institutions	17	9	70	91	12	0
Leisure, Culture, Churches	30	35	70	65	0	0
Education	77	73	23	27	0	0
Social Security	17	2	4	5	79	95
Total	49	35	27	30	24	34

Source: Ambrosanio, Bordinon and Cerniglia 2008, 8.

What is most striking is the central state's withdrawal from public expenditures during the neoliberal era, which will not be gone into here. As for the lower levels, the constitutional reform of 1997/2001 has not been resoundingly successful. It was not until 2009 that the regions were granted financial autonomy by law and thus received a higher share of state revenues. But even before that, the financial situation of the three lower levels of the political systems had seen some profound changes. Earmarked money from the central institutions had been replaced by taxes levied by regional, provincial, and local institutions themselves or by shares of certain revenues. Since 1992 the regions collect revenues from motor vehicle tax, since 1995 parts of the fuel duty. In 1998 a regional tax on net production value (IRAP) was implemented and regions and municipalities benefited from an income tax rise. Since 2000 parts of VAT revenues go to the regions. Whereas in 1992 the three lower levels created only 15 percent of their income themselves (the rest came from the state), it was already 45 percent in 2000 (Ambrosanio, Bordinon and Cerniglia 2008, 3, 5, 9 et seq.).

Although the regions' scope of action has increased considerably since 1997 due to decentralisation, the discrepancies between economically flourishing

and well-managed regions and those less fortunate have grown during the last two decades. Whereas rich regions such as the Aosta Valley or Trentino/South Tyrol could carry out expensive and prestigious projects – for instance the foundation of new universities in Bolzano and Aosta, which are well funded, not by the state such as other Italian universities but by the region¹⁷ – poorer regions, in particular in the South, have to keep up with shortage and scarcity. This however, can differ depending on the influence of the Mafia or similar organisations, illustrated by a comparison of the Basilicata with scarcely any Mafia activities and the neighbouring regions Campania and Calabria (on the continuously substantial economic differences Grasse 2005, 321-40; for a detailed analysis of the regional developments see also: Donati 2012, 52 et seq.). The last column of Table 1 shows considerable compensation payments among different regions, which is one reason for the political discontent in the rich northern regions (Lombardy, Venezia, and Emilia-Romagna) that mainly pay for the others. Income and expenditures per capita of all state levels are balanced in Table 1 showing that mostly southern regions benefit the most from these compensations including Liguria with the highest number of pensioners. Also, autonomous regions were often able to evade compensation payments as is shown by the fact that the rich Aosta Valley was a recipient region and the wealthiest region Trentino/South Tyrol did less than other regions of the north-east (see Ambrosanio et al. 2008, 13-27; Gelli and Grasse, 205 et seq.). The great constitution reform carried out recently (April 2006) by Matteo Renzi further increased the position of the regions by abandoning the *bicameralismo perfetto*. The senate, second chamber and previously equal to the house of representatives, also elected according to a similar electoral law, was replaced by a federal assembly with 100 representatives from 20 regions.

Since the mid-nineteenth century the Italian public has discussed a federal structure and decentralisation. In 1946 decentralisation as national objective was laid down in the constitution, but was initially implemented only gradually and merely in the autonomous regions, as well as against fierce opposition such as in South Tyrol in the 1950s and 1960s. The general mobilisation of the society after “1968” and the willingness of the two large parties DC and PCI to cooperate enabled a first regionalisation wave from the mid-1970s. In the course of the collapse of the First Republic, the left-wing government under Romano Prodi implemented the Bassanini Laws in 1997 against the fierce opposition of the political right headed by Berlusconi, and a constitutional reform in 2001. In so doing, Italy turned away from traditional centralism and

¹⁷ A telling example is the (small) university of Bolzano. In 2008 the vice chancellor received a salary of 190,000 € per annum, full professors got 96,000 € on average, associate professors roughly 67,000 € – which is a lot higher than the salary of professors at other Italian universities <http://www2.consiglio-bz.org/documenti_pdf/idap_218402.pdf> (Accessed April 12, 2017).

experienced a regionalisation of the political system, even though only gradually and slowly. In hindsight, this process was often erratic and inconsistent, since none of the large political camps pursued a consistent and consequent course. The debate on decentralisation is highly ideological and cannot be quantified statistically – in particular in financial terms. Italian statistics are incomplete in general, and this is all the more true for highly controversial political fields.

The reform from 1997 to 2001 radically restructured the Italian multi-level governance system and the balance of power. Given the 150-year-long centralist tradition since the foundation of the nation state, Italy's regionalisation was indeed a 'small revolution' as Alexander Grasse, a renowned expert on this topic outside of Italy, has coined it. It seems that Italian politics will probably soon again oscillate between centralism and regionalism. One reason for this is the asymmetry of the Italian federalist system, which burdens the regions differently and allows autonomous regions to evade compensatory solidarity.

Recent political science theories in the context of the 'scale-debate' explain these shifts of power within the multi-level governance system by pointing at the complex processes of denationalisation and internationalisation of political organisations as well as a decreasing influence of state structures, and refer to the end of the 'Fordist nation state' (see Heeg 2008, 251-66; Gualini 2004). It is difficult for historians to answer the interesting questions raised in these debates: the existing source material does not yet allow those analyses, in particular regarding longer historical processes such as addressed in this article. History as an academic discipline, on the other hand, is less normative and theory oriented than political science and political economy. Therefore, historians have never assumed that theoretical constructs such as the 'Fordist nation state' and 'politics of scale' reflect the complexity of historical reality (as reconstructed according to the source material). They are aware that these 'realities' are socially construed and nothing else than 'transitory formations' shaped by the respective actors and their mindsets. Therefore, the balance and structure of power have to be examined closely in every single case. Theoretical models can help to ask the right and always new questions. But they are of little use to find the right answers – all the more so in Italy, the country of the *dietrologia*, with complex structures difficult to understand behind the official political structures.

It remains to be said that the Italian regions created after 1945 were something entirely new. Only few of them (in particular the autonomous regions, such as Tuscany and Lombardy) had been 'imagined communities' before, with references to older territories and special identities. In the other cases anti-centralist resentments played a role, although they were quickly suppressed within the new state party *Democrazia Cristiana* in favour of a new stability of power. Later, conflicts over resources between the left-leaning opposition and the dominant *Democrazia Cristiana* as well as efforts to generate more effi-

cient governance structures became increasingly important given the loss of legitimacy and the subsequent failure of the First Republic. In order to conclude how fruitful the ‘politics of scale’ approach might be for historical research on Italy, much basic research is still needed.

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